

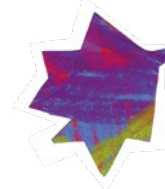
The State of Play in Scotland



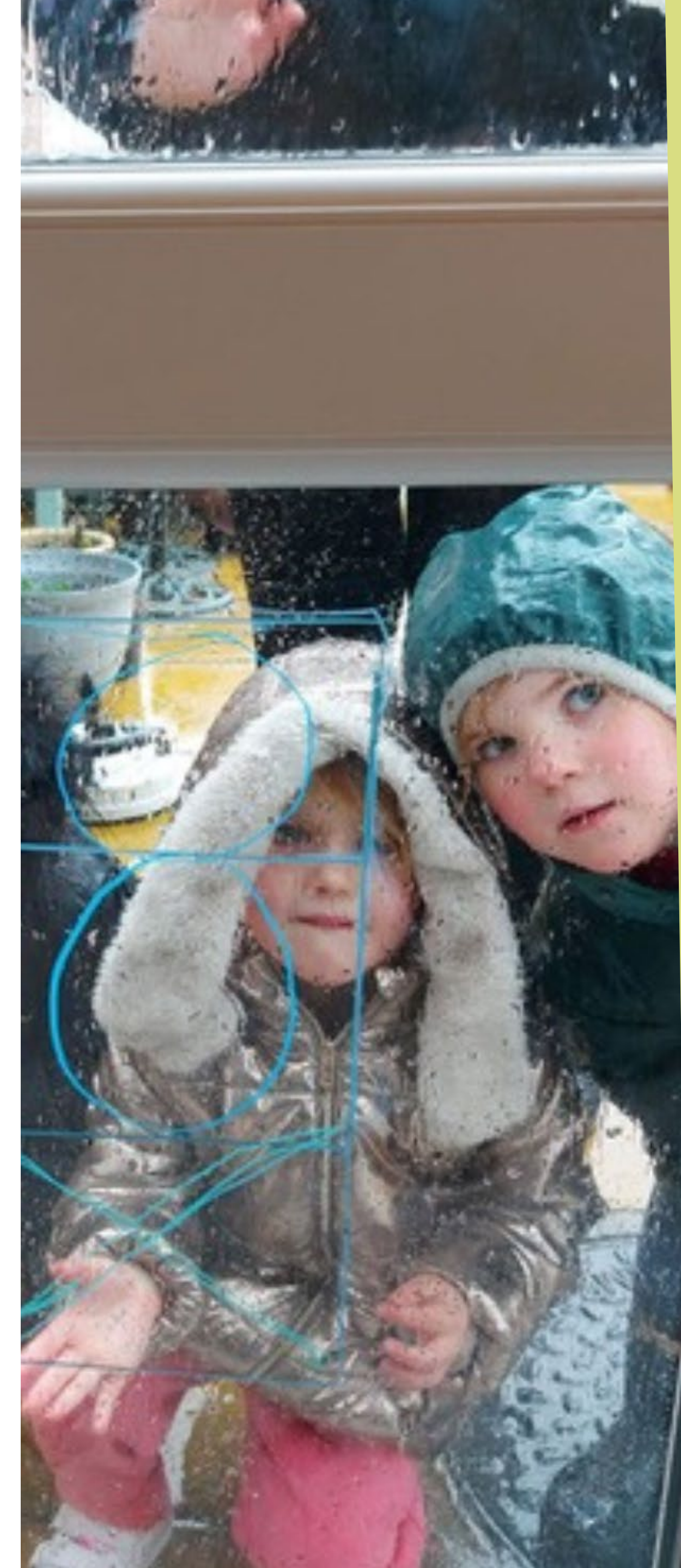
Authors
Dr Lily FitzGibbon
Professor Helen Dodd



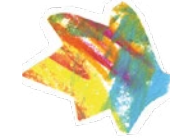
Contents



Executive Summary	3	Not enough places to play locally	16
Integrative approach and objectives	5	Austerity, budget cuts, lack of maintenance	17
Findings	7	Scottish weather	19
Relationships with friends and family are an important part of play	8	Antisocial behaviour and other safety concerns	19
The impact of COVID19 on play	9	Inequality in play opportunities	20
Play outdoors brings opportunities for being active and enjoying nature	10	Socio-demographic background	20
Children and young people's access to local space is precious	11	Disability and Additional Support Needs	21
Diversity of spaces and activities is appreciated	13	Hopes, ideas, and suggestions for improvement	22
Digital play is valued and balance is important	14	More places for play	23
Barriers to play	15	Better access to play spaces	23
		Age-appropriate facilities	24
		Maintain and repair	24



Executive Summary



In this new report, written for Play Scotland, we bring together the findings of four previous reports focused on children's play. Our aim is to highlight the consistent messages across these reports; the things that we can confidently say that we now 'know' based on what children and the people who care for them have said. We have a moral obligation not to keep asking children the same questions, but to take their responses and turn them into action. The report provides some clear recommendations for action and we hope that it inspires change.

Across the report, there are clear messages.

The first set of messages focus on how children and young people think and feel about play. They tell us that:

- **Play is fun and important for children's wellbeing**
- **Relationships with friends and family are an important part of play**
- **Play outdoors brings opportunities for being active and enjoying nature**
- **Children and young people's access to local space is precious**
- **Diversity of spaces and activities is appreciated**
- **Digital play is valued and balance is important**

The second set of messages relate to barriers to play for children and young people. They tell us that their play is affected by:

- **Not enough places to play locally**
- **Austerity, budget cuts, lack of maintenance**
- **Scottish weather**
- **Antisocial behaviour and other safety concerns**

It was clear when reading through the reports and datasets that we used to create this report that the factors that influence children's access to play are many, and that they interact in complex ways. This aligns with our recent research in this area where we asked parents about what helps and what hinders children's outdoor play (e.g. [Oliver et al., 2023¹](#)). It means that when designing spaces for play or looking to increase opportunities for play, addressing any single barrier alone is unlikely to be effective. For example, a new park will not be used if families cannot get to it easily or if it is not maintained. A skatepark won't be used if young people are told they are creating too much noise and told to move on, a green space won't be enjoyed by families if there is litter or dog mess. Improving access to play is not difficult but it can't be tokenistic either, the context around the space needs to be considered. Local consultation is likely to provide important insights for this.





Executive Summary (cont)

Children and young people want spaces that are close to home, interesting and varied and include nature. They want to feel that they are safe and welcome in those spaces and that the space is valued and maintained.

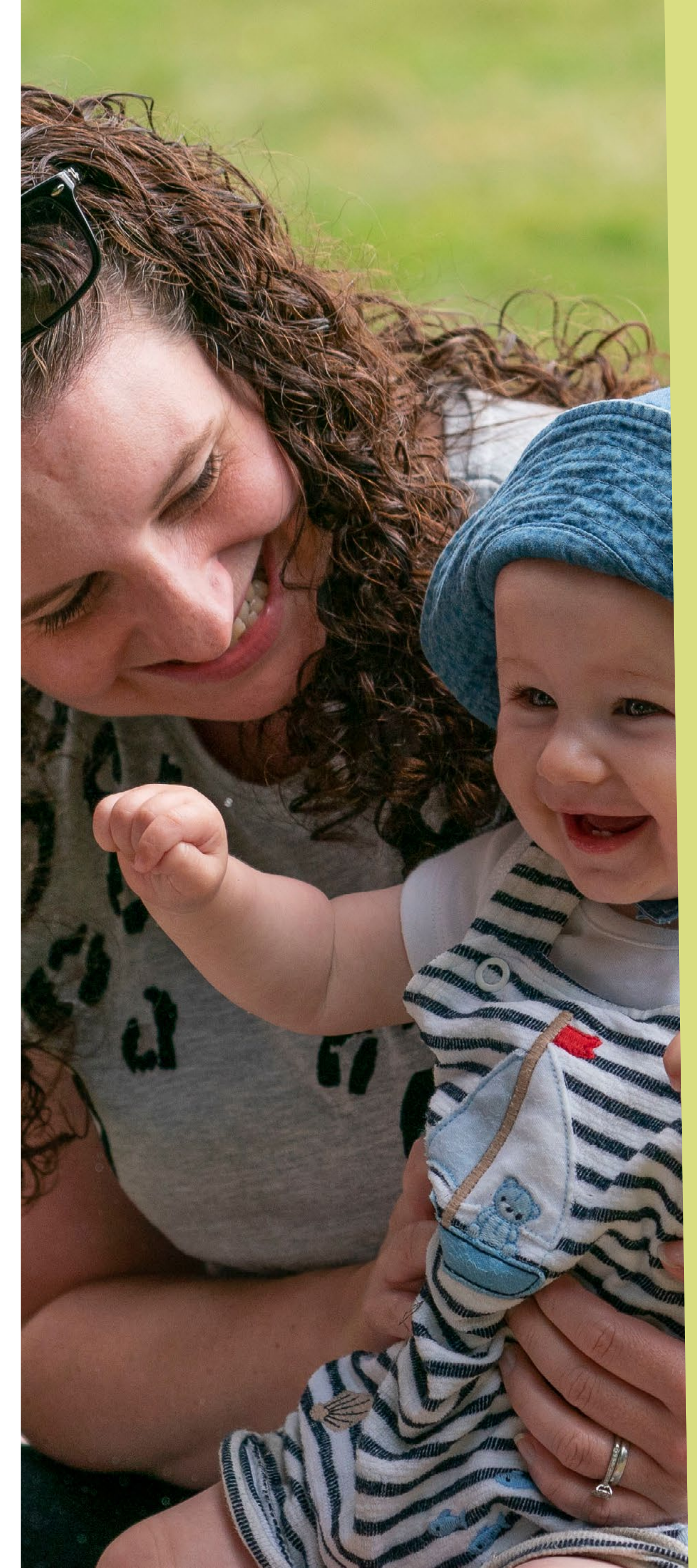
The research also shows that digital play is a valued feature of children's play, so these findings have been highlighted in the report. It was particularly interesting to note that children recognised they needed a break from this type of play and to balance it with outdoor play. Digital play or 'screen time' are often blamed for the decline in outdoor play. This narrative can shift the focus away from the provision of quality outdoor space and place the blame for declining play on children and young people (and their screens). However, these findings suggest that children and young people want to balance digital play with active, outdoor time. It is therefore vital that there are engaging, accessible outdoor spaces available to support this balance. This is especially important for older children and teenagers who often have difficulty finding spaces to play.

We wanted to examine inequalities in access to play, but the data available on this were sparse. Despite the limited data, clear inequalities were apparent for children and young people who are disabled or have additional support needs.

We end the report with children and young people's hopes, ideas and suggestions for making things better. These were surprisingly practical; children and young people aren't asking for the world, they know what the solutions are:

- **More places for play** – these can be informal and natural spaces as well as formal spaces
- **Better access to play spaces** – children and young people need to be able to get to where they want to play
- **Fewer cars, slower traffic** – the danger posed by cars is real, so reducing or calming traffic is vital
- **Opportunities for active travel** – children and young people want to walk and cycle, this gives them freedom
- **Age-appropriate facilities** – most playparks are designed for young children; where will older children play?
- **Maintain and repair** – children want to be able to use what is there already
- **Shelter** – shelter makes it easier to be outside in bad or unpredictable weather
- **Lighting** – lighting makes spaces safer for everyone
- **More inclusive places to play** – safe, accessible, and inclusive play spaces for children and young people with additional support needs

We hope that these practical, solution focussed ideas from children and young people will support decision makers to design effective solutions that facilitate children and young people's access to play in their local area.



Integrative approach and objectives

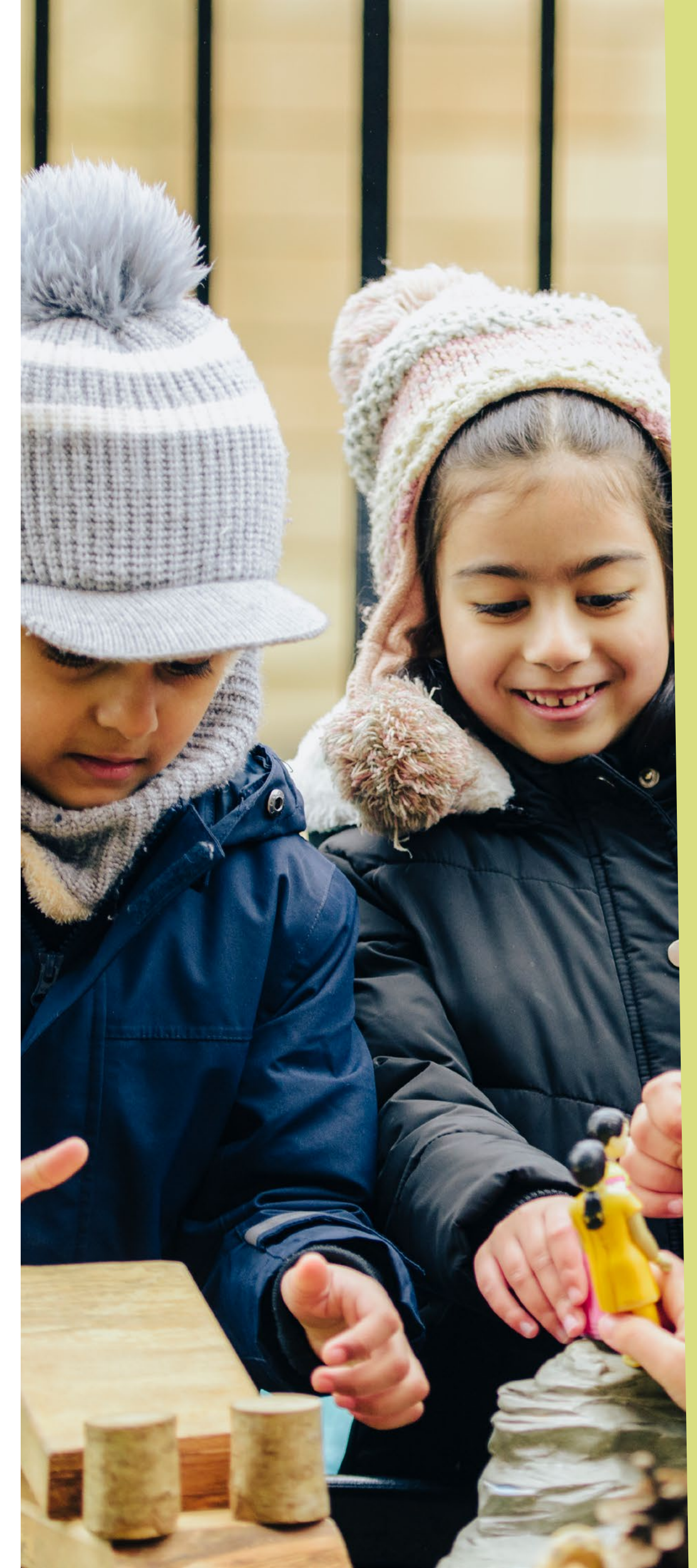
This report brings together data from four large-scale surveys and consultations on play conducted in Scotland between 2016 and 2022, together representing the views of 1572 adults and more than 1300 children and young people. Further information about each dataset is available at the end of the report.

The findings from these four datasets have been integrated in this new report with a focus on three key themes: the value of play; barriers to play; and hopes, ideas, and suggestions for the improvement of play in the future. This integrative report combines key messages from the existing reports on these three themes and new analyses and insights based on the original data, wherever this was available.

Integrating these datasets brings diverse voices and approaches together, since each dataset targeted different groups of respondents and used different methodologies. Quantitative summaries of parents' survey responses are frequently supplemented with quotes from children and young people. Where demographic information was available, quotes have been selected to be representative of the children and young people surveyed and consulted in terms of their age, ethnicity, gender identity, and location.



Figure 1: What children require from Article 31 of the UNCRC, and why it is important. Source: International Play Association (IPA, 2013).



**“Play, as we know,
is an essential
part of a healthy,
happy childhood.”**

Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Action Plan, 2013



Findings

The value of play

Across the four datasets, both adults and children in Scotland are predominantly in agreement on the value and importance of play. In the following sections, we explore parents and children's views on the value of play across the predominant messages emerging from the four datasets.

Play is fun and important for children's wellbeing

Children, young people, and parents alike recognise that play is both fun in itself and important for children's wellbeing. In the 2016 Scottish Home Play Survey, 98% of parents agreed that play is good for a child's sense of wellbeing and 96% agreed that play helps children become more confident.

In the 2022 consultation, children were asked to report the best things about play in their local area. Children and young people's responses reflected the fun of play:

"Having fun and good times!"

11-year-old, White Scottish, male, Castlemilk, Glasgow

"Lots of outdoor fun in the woods and playpark"

6-year-old, mixed ethnicity, female, Near Falkland, Fife

"It's fun... Being happy"

Group response representing 72 5- to 12-year-olds from a rural primary school in Dumfries and Galloway

Children and young people also reflected on the role of play in sustaining their wellbeing:

"Keeps you focused, if you're sad it can help you not think about it"

12-year-old, White Scottish, gender-fluid, Edinburgh

"You get to forget your worries for a while"


15-year-old, White Scottish, female, Cambuslang, Glasgow

"Having the freedom to express myself"

Group response from three 9- to 12-year-olds from Inverness

"I feel better about myself"

Group response from three 7- to 15-year-olds with additional support needs from East Kilbride



Relationships with friends and family are an important part of play

Across the datasets, children, young people, and parents recognised the importance of play for forming and maintaining relationships with friends and family.

In the 2016 Scottish Home Play survey, 94% of parents agreed that playing helps their child become more sociable. Looking at who children play with, 88% of children play with friends, 74% of children play with siblings, and 72% of children play with parents or guardians. In terms of their main play partners, for 45% of children, a sibling was their main play partner, and for 39%, a friend was their main play partner.

Only 20% of parents reported being 'very happy' with the amount of time they have available to play with their child, suggesting that 80% of respondents would value having more time to play with their child. Results from the 2017 Playday Survey suggest a generational decline in play with friends: while 59% of those who were children in 1987 recalled that most of their play was with friends, only 39% of parents in 2017 reported the same for their children.

Friends are a dominant theme in children and young people's descriptions of their favourite ways to play, things to do, and the best things about playing and hanging out in their local area:

“going out for walks with my friends and sitting about having a laugh” child, no age recorded, East Lothian

“Just be with the group, walk, put on music, dance, explore places. Important to be close to each other, and comfortable (warm).” child, no age recorded, East Lothian

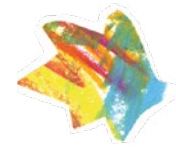
“I like having fun with my friends”

8-year-old, White Scottish, male, Bishopbriggs, Glasgow

“I really like hanging out with my friends and getting to know them and I love drawing and Pokémon”

8-year-old, White Scottish, female, Fochabers, Moray





The impact of COVID19 on play

The impact of the COVID19 pandemic highlighted the importance of playing with friends:

“We like to play with our friends but we don’t get to see them now” child, no age recorded, East Lothian

“It has changed my life, I can’t see or play with my friends. We can’t touch each other. We weren’t allowed to play in the park or go fun places”

child, no age recorded, Highlands and Islands

“Most of my friends I play with most at school, I now can’t do that.” child, no age recorded, East Lothian

Children also reported the value of playing with their family during the COVID19 pandemic, often the only playmates that were available to them:

“I like to play with my sister. We like to dance in my bedroom, play at home and at the park. We like imaginative play making up games with our toys and based on our favourite film, lion king” child, age not reported, East Lothian

“I also like playing board games at home with my family.” child, age not reported, East Lothian

“I like to play with my brothers, because my friends don’t really play much anymore.”
child, age not reported, East Lothian





Play outdoors brings opportunities for being active and enjoying nature

Outdoor and active play is popular and valued by children, young people, and parents. In the 2016 Scottish Home Play Survey, among different types of play, active play was the most commonly reported by parents, with 84% of parents reporting that their 8- to 12-year-old child had engaged in active play in the last week. 96% of parents agreed that playing is good for their child's physical health.

Despite the generally positive attitudes towards active and outdoor play, results from the 2017 Playday survey suggest generational decline in time spent playing outdoors. While 68% of adults who were children in 1987 recalled that they spent 'far more time playing outdoors than indoors', conversely 69% adults without children in 2017 perceived that children spend 'far more time playing indoors than outdoors'.

Nonetheless, active and adventurous play were the most popular ways to play listed by children in the 2022 NPF4 consultation, listed as a favourite way to play in 75% and 62% of individual responses and 87% and 90% of group responses respectively. Children and young people's open-ended responses to questions about their favourite places to play and the best things about playing in their local area strongly reflected the value of outdoor play.

Children and young people frequently listed outdoor spaces as their favourite place to play, including parks, beaches, woods, and sports fields:

"Imaginative play and running around with my friends eg park/school/beach/wood with sticks and stuff like that"
young person recruited through East Lothian Local Council

"The park and the woods looking for the gruffalo and fairies"
6-year-old, White British, female, Airdrie, North Lanarkshire

"wide open spaces" 13-year-old, female, Glenrothes, Fife

Playing outdoors brought opportunities to be active and adventurous:

"Being active, getting out in fresh air"
11-year-old, Black/Black Scottish, male, North Glasgow

"To meet people also get out the house for a while, get some fresh air"
9-year-old, White Scottish, female, Motherwell, North Lanarkshire

"My favourite place is the woods as I can go for adventures there." child, age not reported, East Lothian

"Playing football and play adventure games"
10-year-old, Asian Scottish, male, Bishopbriggs, Glasgow

Playing outdoors also brought opportunities to connect with nature:

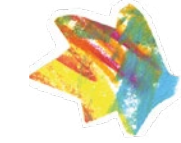
"The trees are amazing and yesterday we've seen a deer on our walk." 5-year-old White British male, Dalkeith, Edinburgh

"The open green spaces the water for tadpoles"
9-year-old, White Scottish, male, Dunblane, Stirling

"Being outside and being with friends enjoying nature."
5-year-old, White Scottish, male, Bishopbriggs, Glasgow

"I really like going to the woods to enjoy the fresh air and nature." group response representing 20 6- to 11-year-olds from a village primary school in Ross and Cromarty, Highland





Children and young people's access to local space is precious

The extent to which children play outdoors in their neighbourhoods has changed across a generation – with children's play shifting from public to private space. While 42% of those who were children in 1987 recalling playing 'all over the neighbourhood', only 16% of parents in 2017 reported the same for their children. Conversely, only 23% of those who were children in 1987 reported mostly playing in their garden or yard compared to 45% of parents in 2017 reporting the same of their children.

Nonetheless, children and young people's responses about the best things about playing, hanging out, and doing hobbies in their local area suggest that they value having local public spaces to play and hang out for several reasons.

They can get there easily:

"We don't need to drive far and can do it last minute"

8-year-old, White Scottish, female, Motherwell, North Lanarkshire

"It's fun, I can meet my friends, it doesn't take long to get there" 6-year-old, White Scottish, female, Airdrie, North Lanarkshire

"It's close to home and easy to go to"

6-year-old, White Scottish, male, Musselburgh, East Lothian

They can be independent from parents and guardians:

"I can see my friends, play independently with mum close by" 11-year-old, White Scottish, male, Freuchie, Fife

"Don't have too far to go home so I can be trusted to go myself or with friends" 9-year-old, White Scottish, female, Nairn, Moray

"When I can meet and play with my friends and where I can be safe to play more independently from my mum."

child, primary school-age, White Scottish, male, Jedburgh, Scottish Borders

Local spaces support active travel:

"I can walk or cycle and don't need my mum or dad to drive me." 9-year-old, White Scottish, female, East Glasgow

"easy to get to on a traffic free cycle path."

13-year-old, Glenrothes, Fife

"Children agreed that the choice of parks & green spaces within walking distance was the best feature of their local community." group response representing 95 6- to 11-year-old children from a primary school in Larbert

Local spaces for play are good for sustaining friendships from school:

"Seeing my friends after school"

8-year-old, White Scottish, male, East Glasgow

"I get to see my friends from School"

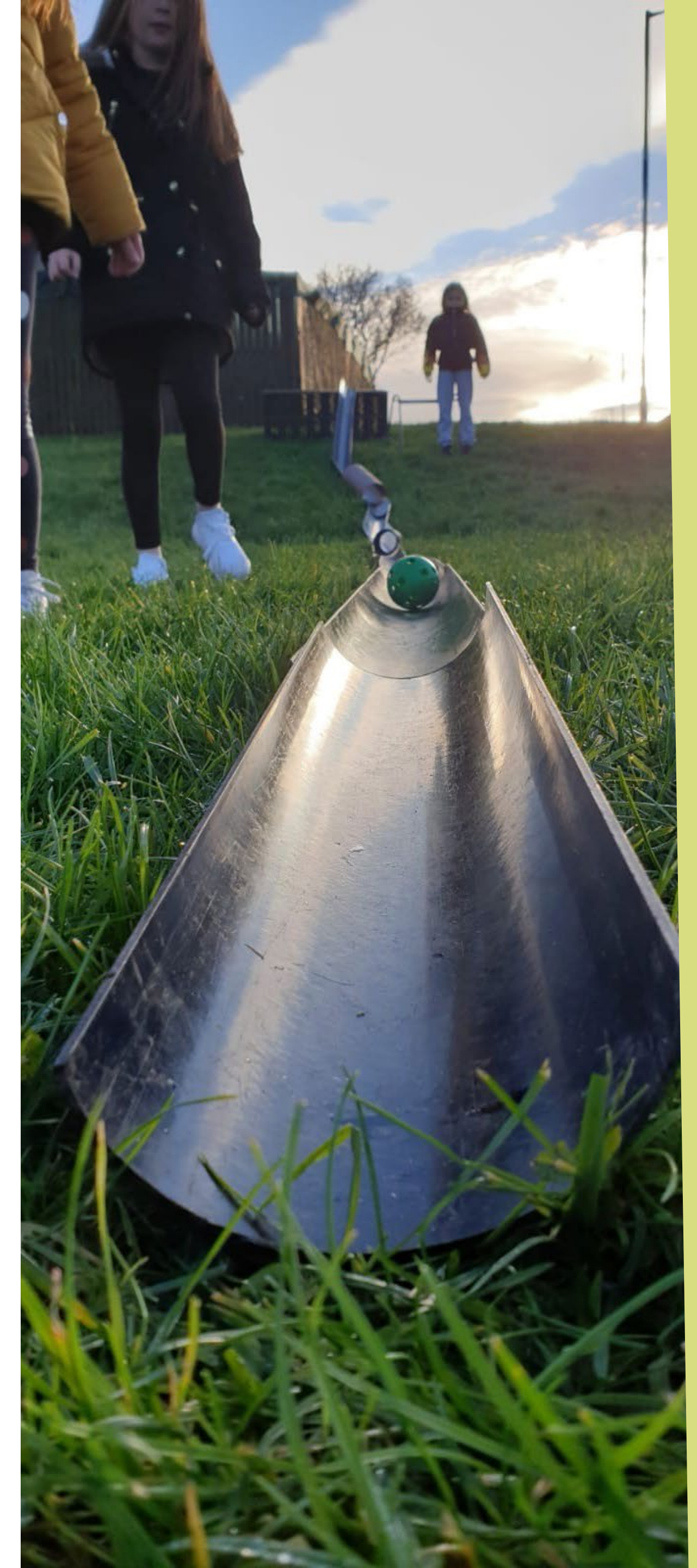
6-year-old, White Scottish, female, Chapelhall, North Lanarkshire

And making new friendships:

"You can make friends" 11-year-old, White, female, Castlemilk, Glasgow

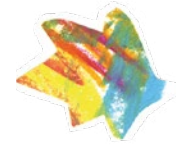
"Mixing with other children & my friends" 11-year-old, White British, female, Melrose, Scottish Borders

"Making new friends" 6-year-old, White Scottish, Male, Motherwell, North Lanarkshire



“Fewer children are allowed to travel on their own to places within walking distance other than school. The figure has reduced from 55% in 1971 to a maximum of 33% in 2010.”

Play Builds Children, CPPF



Diversity of spaces and activities is appreciated

The 2016 Scottish Home Play Survey revealed that children's play is characterised by participation in a variety of different types of play and activities, with children participating an average of 6.9 different types of play during the previous week. In this same survey, 57% of parents agreed that their child would benefit from a wider variety of play activities. The 2017 Playday Survey suggests there may have been generational declines in the number of open spaces available locally for play. 68% of respondents who were children in 1987 recalled that they had access to lots of open spaces across the neighbourhood for play, in contrast to 52% of parents reporting the same for their child in 2017.

This desire for diversity in play opportunities was also reflected in children and young people's open responses about the best things about their local area:

"Lots of different things to do and see"

5-year-old, White Scottish, male, Freuchie, Fife

"I like the different things in the parks. I like the Monkey bars."

6-year-old, White Scottish, female, Aberdeen

"There's lots of space and there's so many different things you can do"

12-year-old, White Scottish, female, Dunlop, East Ayrshire





Digital play is valued and balance is important

The value of digital play was another common message across several datasets. The 2017 Playday Survey suggests a considerable generational increase in screen-based play (as would be expected given the technological changes over that same period). While 90% of those growing up in 1987 spent either 'none' or 'hardly any' of their time in active screen-based play, only 38% of parents in 2017 reported that their child spent 'none' or 'hardly any' of their time in active screen-based play. This concurs with results from the 2016 Home Play Survey, in which interactive and passive digital play were the second and third most commonly reported types of play recorded, with 81% and 77% of respondents saying that their child had engaged in interactive and passive digital play in the last week respectively. Digital play also represented the largest portion of children's play time.

Most parents agreed that playing online helps children to become more confident using technology (82%), that online websites and games can have an educational benefit (78%) and that their child develops new skills through playing online (70%). However, parents also expressed many concerns about the dangers of digital play. 41% of parents were extremely concerned and a further 22% were quite concerned about their child getting bullied online. 25% of parents were extremely concerned and a further 29% were quite concerned about their child losing social skills from being online too much.

During the COVID19 pandemic, many children and young people were not able to meet up with their friends, so digital play became an important way to stay connected with friends. This was reflected in children and young people's descriptions of their

favourite ways to play in the 2021 Play Strategy consultation. Digital play was often discussed in the context of connecting with friends:

"i like to play video games with my friends who live far away. so i have to call them to talk to them"

"I play in my room on my Xbox with lots of friends"

"Playing Minecraft, in my room, with my sister or on FaceTime with my friends."

"I don't play in real life with my friends I use my Xbox to play with them"

All from children in East Lothian, ages not reported

Children and young people's responses also suggest that they recognise the need for a balance of digital and outdoor play. For example, some children listed getting a break from digital play among the best things about playing, hanging out, and doing hobbies in their local area:

"Meeting friends and being outside. Takes me away from my Nintendo and keeps me active"

"Fresh air, fitness, less screen time"

11-year-old, White British, male, Dunbar, East Lothian

While other children recognised digital play as a barrier to playing out more often:

"I tend to be in my devices a lot"

10-year-old, White British, female, Kintore, Aberdeenshire

"Twice a week - my mum says it should be more but I prefer my screen." 11-year-old, White Scottish, female, Glasgow



Barriers to play

Results from the 2017 Playday Survey suggest a generational decrease in satisfaction with opportunities for play, with 89% of those growing up in 1987 reporting that they were either 'very' or 'quite' satisfied with play opportunities when they were children, compared with 64% of parents reporting being satisfied with opportunities for their own children in 2017. In the 2016 Scottish Home Play survey, only 22% reported no barriers to their children playing. In the following sections, we discuss barriers to play that have emerged repeatedly from the four datasets and may explain this growing dissatisfaction.

“Let’s replace all ‘no ball games’ signs with ‘children welcome to play here’”

Maree Todd, MSP,
Minister for Children and Young People, 2017-2021



Photo: East Lothian Play Association #OkayToPlay Campaign



Not enough places to play locally

Mirroring the value of choice and diverse local spaces, a lack of good places to play was perceived as a barrier by some parents and many children and young people. While only 15% of parents endorsed a lack of good places to play locally as a barrier to their children's play in the 2016 Scottish Home Play Survey, this was a frequent theme in children and young people's considerations of the worst things about playing, hanging out, and doing hobbies in their local area:

"Some of the parks don't have enough things to do in them" 11-year-old, Arab/Arab Scottish, female, Castlemilk, Glasgow

"There isn't too much to do. The outdoor parks aren't great and there is nowhere indoors like a sports centre." 9-year-old, White Scottish, female, East Glasgow

"There are not enough places to go with my friends. It gets boring going to the same few places." 10-year-old, White Scottish, female, Bucksburn, Aberdeenshire

In particular, older children and teenagers often felt that there was nothing for their age group, or that they were not welcome in local public spaces:

"It is small and not for teenagers." 14-year-old, White British, female, Melrose, Scottish Borders

"no, all too far a walk away and not much to play with for our ages. All too small or babyish." 13-year-old, White Scottish, female, Glenrothes, Fife

"Bit run down. I'm too old for parks" 12-year-old, White Scottish, male, Stirling

"Only park in my village is for little kids, doesn't look right for us to use it as a hangout and don't want to be seen as delinquents." group response representing 17 12- to 20-year-olds from the Dumfries and Galloway Youth Council

"Sometimes older people don't like groups of teenagers" 14-year-old, White Scottish, male, Edinburgh

Not having good quality places to play locally meant that children were reliant on parents, or couldn't play at all because of the distances involved:

"We love parks but have to travel to visit them so need to use the bus with mum or wait for dad to be day off to drive us" 9-year-old, White Scottish, male, Stirling

"The places are too far away to walk. My parents can't always take me." 15-year-old, White Scottish, female, Cambuslang, Glasgow

"I'm far away from the village. Can't walk" 10-year-old, White Scottish, male, Balnain, Highland

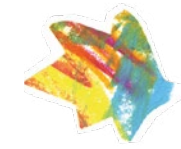
Safe access to the spaces available for play is also crucial, and traffic, parked cars, and busy roads can be further barriers to play, particularly independent play:

"some children cited busy roads as being a barrier to get where they needed to be, even if those places were within 5 minutes of their homes."

group response representing 12 7- to 12-year-olds from a primary school in Dundee

"There is nowhere in my street that is safe to meet up with friends and play, my friends live 10/15 min walk from me, my mum won't let me out by myself because the traffic is busy and it's boring by myself if my friends aren't with me." 9-year-old, White Scottish, male, Glasgow





Austerity, budget cuts, lack of maintenance

One reason for the dissatisfaction with opportunities for play may be the perceived effects of austerity and budget cuts. 80% of participants in the 2017 Playday survey felt that austerity and budget cuts had affected recreational services and facilities for children and young people including play areas in parks (44%), youth clubs (43%), after school clubs (38%), play facilities in school (37%), and adventure playgrounds (36%).

Many children and young people reported parks and play equipment that were poorly maintained or broken among the worst things about playing, hanging out, and doing hobbies in their local area:

“The parks are all broken and need fixed. It makes me sad.”

10-year-old, female, Stonehaven, Aberdeenshire

“Everything is old and broken It all needs cleaned and fixed”

8-year-old, White Scottish, male, Glasgow

“Long walk to the play ground as the wee one in our scheme had to be closed due to contamination during a flood in 2021 and has never been looked at since.”

6-year-old, White Scottish, male, Freuchie, Fife

Children and young people also reported that parks and public spaces were often not cared for as well as they should be by the community. Dog fouling, litter, and vandalism were common themes when children and young people were asked what the worst things about playing, hanging out, and doing hobbies in their local area:

“The children said that there was ‘a lot of rubbish’ at the parks which makes the park look ‘dirty and disgusting.’”
group response representing 12 5-to -12-year-olds from a primary school in Musselburgh

“There is broken glass, and rubbish everywhere and occasionally needles in the local playparks the Local Authority don’t keep them clean. There are bins but no bags in them and they overflow.”
11-year-old, White Scottish, female, Bellshill, North Lanarkshire



“Wherever they live, children and young people of all ages, abilities and interests, should be able to play in a variety of ways, in high quality spaces, within sight of their homes or within easy walking distance, where they feel safe whether or not they are accompanied by adults.”

Getting it Right for Play, Play Scotland



Scottish weather

Scottish weather was another recurrent theme when both parents and children described the barriers to play. 50% of parents in the 2016 Scottish Home Play Survey cited bad weather as a factor that has prevented their children from playing, and 39% of parents in the 2017 Playday Survey reported that they did not want their children to play out in bad weather. Children also reported that rain, cold, and bad weather in general as factors that stop them playing out more often:

“When its so so so rainy and so so so cold”

5-year-old, White Scottish, female, Kirkliston, West Lothian

“Mostly in winter, the weather isn’t the best so I didn’t go out playing as often. Mostly the weather bothers me”

9-year-old, White Scottish, female, Larbert, Falkirk

“The weather because there is nowhere indoors to meet up and play that doesn’t cost a lot.”

8-year-old, White Scottish, female, Glasgow

Antisocial behaviour and other safety concerns

Results of the 2016 Scottish Home Play Survey revealed that parents held many concerns about outside play. 84% of parents of children aged between 8 and 12 reported that they were at least a little concerned about ‘stranger danger’ outside the home, and 75% reported that they were at least a little concerned that their child might get bullied while playing outside the home. 57% reported being at least a little concerned about their child becoming involved in antisocial behaviour.

Unlike adults, children and young people rarely mentioned concerns relating to ‘stranger danger’. Children and young people’s responses did reflect concerns about bullying, intimidation, and antisocial behaviour, mostly from older children:

“Older teenagers hang out, intimidate & leave rubbish.”

11-year-old, White British, female, Melrose, Scottish Borders

“Get pushed around.”

7-year-old, White Scottish, Male, Kilwinning, North Ayrshire

“Cold and crowded, you might avoid the parks because too many young kids or too many teenagers - you feel intimidated... Teenagers and antisocial behaviour, they creep around. Dodgy old men, drunk people.”

group response representing 20 10- to 12-year-olds from a village primary school in Dumfries and Galloway





Inequality in play opportunities

The datasets were relatively limited in the capacity to assess inequalities in play opportunities. It is recommended that the issues raised below are investigated and explored further with more representative data collection and direct consultation of affected groups.

Socio-demographic background

When addressing questions about socio-demographic background and opportunities for play, the results from the two datasets that contained the relevant information were somewhat mixed.

The 2016 Home Play Survey report compared responses from parents from 'higher' ABC1 socio-demographic backgrounds with those from 'lower' C2DE backgrounds from suggested socio-demographic differences in children's opportunities for play. ABC1 respondents reported that their children were more likely to play longer at weekend, more likely play together with their parent, and took part in a greater variety of activities than C2DE respondents. The report also suggested different barriers to play were relevant for these socio-demographic groups, with ABC1 respondents more likely to report that their children experience 'positive' barriers such as too much homework and time spent engaging in extra-curricular activities. In contrast, C2DE respondents were more likely to report 'negative' barriers such as lack of available space for play.

However, these results should be treated with some caution because different recruitment strategies may also explain these differences.

The postcode data in the 2022 consultation allowed comparisons to be made between responses from those children and young people living in the areas with the highest and lowest indices of multiple deprivation. Children and young people living in areas with the highest and lowest SIMD scores (highest and lowest quintiles) did not differ in their satisfaction with the amount they got to play out. There were also no noticeable qualitative differences in their reported barriers to playing out more. Children and young people living in areas with the highest and lowest quintiles both reported barriers to play being the lack of suitable and safe places for their age and/or needs, and reliance on busy parents to take them to play spaces, the weather and relatedly, the lack of affordable or free indoor spaces to play.





Disability and Additional Support Needs

A picture of inequalities in play opportunities specific to children growing up with disabilities and additional support needs emerged naturally when examining children and young people's responses to the two consultations. Many responses to the 2022 consultation reflected a lack of safe and accessible local play spaces for children and young people with additional support needs. Children and young people reported that they did not feel able, safe, or welcome in their local public spaces:

“Not built for kids like me.”

15-year-old, White Scottish, male, Motherwell, North Lanarkshire

“Little wheelchair access, limited disabled friendly equipment, little thought on the wider community use of play areas and spaces.”

4-year-old, White Scottish, male, Polmont, Falkirk

“No, I use a wheelchair full time and there isn't many places I can join in locally.”

9-year-old, White Scottish, female, Motherwell, North Lanarkshire

“There is nowhere safe for me to play/go unless supervised by an adult due to my ASN including PICA”

11-year-old, White Scottish, female, Bellshill, North Lanarkshire

“There is nothing to. I am autistic and need places I can feel safe and secure”

14-year-old, White Scottish, female, Torphichen, West Lothian

Responses to the 2021 National Play Strategy Review consultation also reflected that COVID had affected the play and recreation of many children with additional support needs, because many specialist clubs and play spaces had been suspended or closed:

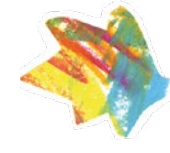
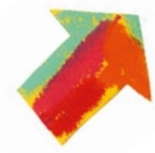
“All my clubs and activities have been suspended since lockdown: karate, swimming, ASN clubs where I go to play”

“I cannot go to Linn park adventure playground right now. This has had a big impact on my health and I miss it. We go to regular parks but it's not the same as I can't run and people stare.”

“I can't go all the places I used to I have dwarfism and can't attend my football for children with ASN or ASN led bushcraft”

Children, various locations, ages not recorded





Hopes, ideas, and suggestions for improvement

Across the datasets, children, young people, and those who care for them shared their hopes, ideas, and suggestions to improve play in their communities. In the 2017 Playday Survey, respondents were asked to select statements about how play in their community could be improved. In accordance with the barriers reported above, respondents (62% of whom were parents of children under 18) perceived that play in their community would get better if there were more places to play (53%), if it was easier to get access to play places and spaces (50%), if adults were more tolerant of play (43%), and if traffic was slowed down (42%).

In the 2021 National Play Strategy consultation, children were asked to share their 'big messages' in response to the COVID19 pandemic. Overall, children wanted the freedom to play, have fun, and see friends and family again. Reflecting the values expressed above, play, fun, and relationships are hugely precious to children.

“We need more play”

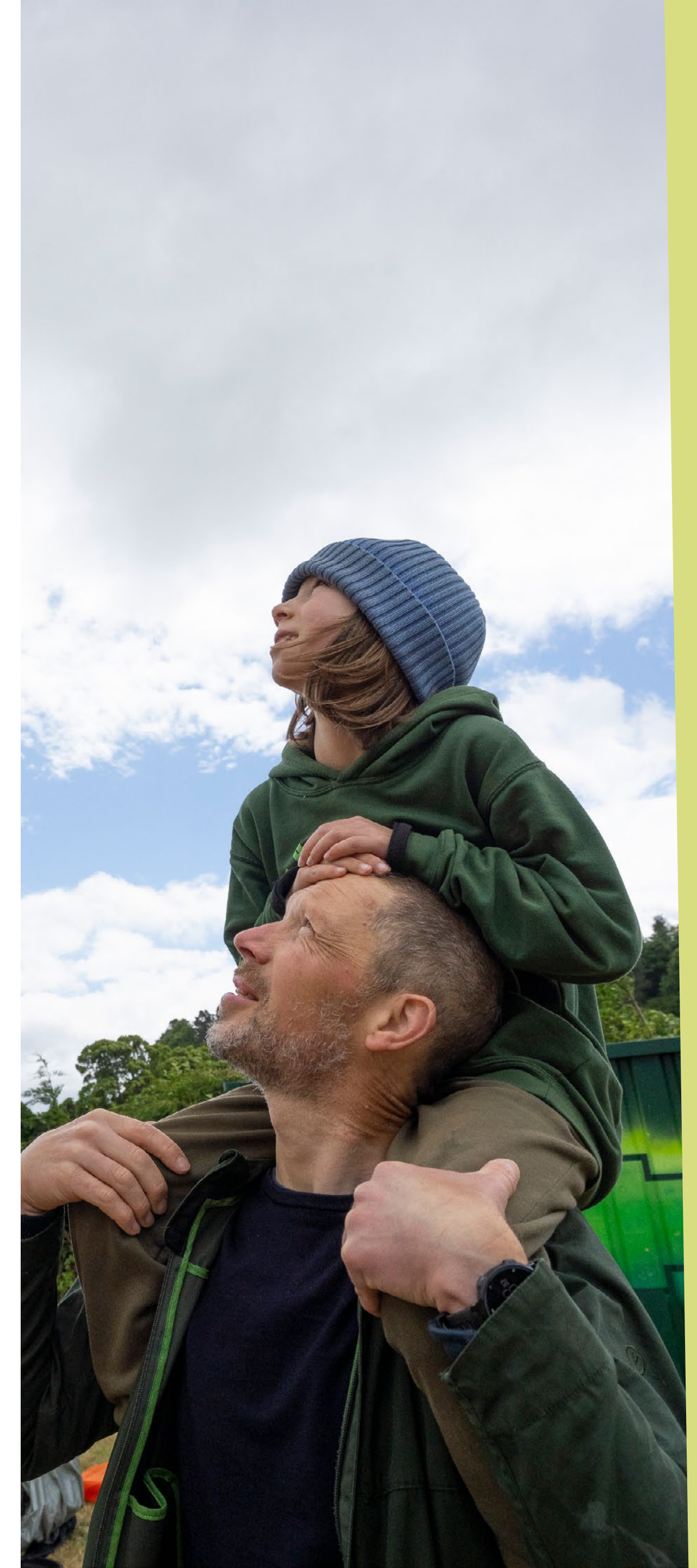
“Less rules.”

“Let’s have fun.”

“I don’t stop being a child, even with coronavirus. Don’t forget about children”

Respondents recruited through the East Lothian and Midlothian local councils.

As well as a general request for their core values to be respected and protected, children and young people had many ideas for overcoming the barriers to play that they identified.





More places for play

Children had endless creative ideas for kinds of places and activities that they would like to see in their local area. Their suggestions reflected the desire for both formal places like sports pitches and play parks and informal places including natural spaces:

“A space to meet friends to create and play that mum doesn’t have to book and pay for.” 9-year-old, male, White Scottish, Stirling

“Something to climb, in the trees and woods more options of den making. Glass house with fish to see and ice cream to buy”

4-year-old, White Scottish, male, Bishopbriggs, Glasgow

Better access to play spaces

Children want better access to play spaces, so they can practice their independence. This includes safer roads and opportunities for active travel.

“I wish I could do more things on my own but my mum and dad normally need to take me places because they are far away. My mum and dad pay for everything too, I wish some things did not cost money”

8-year-old, White Scottish, male, East Glasgow

“I would like more flowers and wildlife to grow and animals to be safer.”

10-year-old, White Scottish, female, Musselburgh, East Lothian

“Maybe in my street there could be a big forest with lots of sticks and trees. We could build dens and role play a lot”

9-year-old, White Scottish, female, Larbert, Falkirk

“more nature”, “more trees”, “more green safe spaces to play in” and “more places for adventurous play”

group response representing 12 5- to 12-year-olds from a primary school in Musselburgh

“Places I can walk to safely and near my street. Places where you can do parkour or climbing. Places that are close enough I could go myself without crossing busy roads.”

11-year-old, White Scottish, male, Cambuslang, Glasgow





Age-appropriate facilities

Most playparks are designed for young children, many children and young people wanted challenging and age-appropriate spaces where they felt both safe and welcome:

“A challenging large adventure playground (like Ormiston, Dunbar, Peebles) in Ironmills Park - with different bits for different age groups, so there’d be fun challenging things for me without worrying about stepping on babies or being rushed by much older kids.”

5-year-old, White British, male, Dalkeith, East Lothian

“Spaces to play at school, not just astro, tennis court, nice places to sit, climb on etc where teenagers feel welcome”

14-year-old, White Scottish, male, Edinburgh

“more challenging playparks, higher slides”

13-year-old, female, Stirling

Maintain and repair

Children’s requests were often simple – make better use of what’s there by maintaining, repairing, and upgrading existing facilities. They suggested providing more bins to reduce littering and dog fouling.

“A park that’s usable.”

10-year-old, White Scottish, female, Stevenson, Ayrshire

“I would fix the park”

8-year-old, White Scottish, male, Glasgow

“I would upgrade Bishopbriggs park. I would put in tyre swings and a bigger slide. I would like more things to climb on too. They already have a wood which is cool.”

11-year-old, White Scottish, female, Bishopbriggs, Glasgow

“I would like more play areas with more varied equipment to suit older children too and for the broken equipment to be fixed. I would also like there to be more public toilets.”

8-year-old, male, Glasgow





Shelter and protection from the weather

Unpredictable or harsh weather conditions often prevent children and young people from playing and hanging out. They suggested more indoor provision including clubs and activities, but also outdoor shelters and access to clothing suitable for all weather conditions.

“Somewhere with cosy places to sit with my friends.”

10-year-old, White British, female, Kintore, Aberdeenshire

“Hang out area outdoors with seating and shelter”

14-year-old, White Scottish, female, Torphichen, West Lothian

“Access to outdoor clothing - waterproofs, wellies, puddle suits”

group response representing 242 5- to 11-year-olds from Cumbernauld, North Lanarkshire

Lighting

Some young people wanted well-lit spaces and access routes so that they can travel and hang out safely and independently.

“Safety getting there, well-lit pavements”

15-year-old, White Scottish, female, Cambuslang, Glasgow

“Better street lighting.”

12-year-old, White Scottish, female, Kilmarnock, Ayrshire

More inclusive places to play

Disabled children and young people and those with additional support needs as well as the people who look after them wanted safer and more accessible places for play. Children wanted inclusive places for playing with their friends and siblings of all abilities.

“For kids like me we need a safe place to go.”

15-year-old, White Scottish, male, Motherwell, North Lanarkshire

“Things I can use and equipment I can access. Also changing places toilets I could use”

9-year-old, White Scottish, female, Motherwell, North Lanarkshire

“Somewhere my sister could also join in, she has a disability and nothing for her to do”

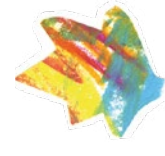
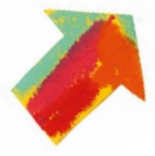
8-year-old, White Scottish, female, Holytown, North Lanarkshire

“For the parks to be nicer looking, have accessible play equipment in them. It would be also good to have more groups locally that cater for children with any additional support needs including physically disabled.”

9-year-old, White Scottish, male, Glasgow



Photo credit: HAGS



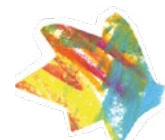
Conclusion

The messages are clear from children and young people. Children and young people want spaces that are close to home, interesting and varied and include nature. They want to feel that they are safe and welcome in those spaces and that the space is valued and maintained.

A picture of inequalities in play opportunities specific to children growing up with disabilities and additional support needs emerged naturally when examining children and young people's responses to the consultations. Many responses to the 2022 consultation reflected a lack of safe and accessible local play spaces for children and young people with additional support needs. Children and young people with disabilities reported that they did not feel able, safe, or welcome in their local public spaces.

We hope that these practical, solution focussed messages and ideas from children and young people will support decision makers in co-designing effective solutions that facilitate all children and young people's access to a wide range of play opportunities in their local area.





Datasets included in this report

2016 Scottish Home Play Survey

The 2016 Scottish Home Play Survey comprises survey responses from 618 parents and caregivers of children aged between 8 and 12 living in Scotland. Data were collected between 18th March and 9th May 2016 as part of a consultation relating to the development of a Play Scotland App.

The main sample of 539 respondents was recruited through the Play Scotland members newsletter, distribution by organisations associated with Play Scotland, social media, and word of mouth. An additional sample of 79 respondents was recruited using an online panel and email invitations to address a natural bias towards respondents with higher socio-economic background. The results were weighted to represent the Scottish population in terms of socio-economic background. The sample consisted of 91% female respondents. The full report by Progressive is available [here](#).

2017 Playday Survey (Scotland subset)

The 2017 Playday Survey comprises survey responses from 954 adults living in Scotland (a subset of a larger sample from across the UK). Data were collected in 2017, coinciding with the 30th Anniversary of Playday, the national day for play. The survey aimed to provide a retrospective comparison between play in 2017 and play in 1987, when Playday began.

The sample was recruited through the national play associations, associated organisations, and via social media. 62% of respondents were children in 1987 and responded to questions about play in 1987. 63% of respondents had children under the age of 18 in 2017 and responded to questions about play in 2017. The sample consisted of 93% female respondents. The full report by Professor John McKendrick is available [here](#).

2021 Scotland's Play Strategy Children and Young People's Consultation

The 2021 Play Strategy Children and Young People's Consultation comprises 311 survey responses from children and young people. In some cases, responses were recorded on behalf of children by a parent or caregiver, or responses were made on behalf of a small group of children. The children and young people represented were aged between 0 and 18, with around half of the responses representing children and young people aged between 12 and 18. Further demographic information about the respondents was not reported. Data were collected in 2021 as part of a consultation to determine the impact of the COVID19 pandemic on children's play.

Surveys were distributed to children and young people via the Play Scotland newsletter (17 responses), East Lothian local council who distributed the survey to schools, families, and parent groups (212 responses), Midlothian local council who distributed the survey to vulnerable families and keyworkers in high SIMD areas (50 responses), the Care and Learning Alliance, to encourage responses from children growing up in the Highlands and Islands (7 responses), and Venturing Out and Can Do Scotland to encourage responses from disabled children and those with additional support needs (5 and 4 responses respectively). Additionally, Concrete Garden, an organisation supporting vulnerable families in Glasgow, and Licketyspit, an organisation supporting asylum seekers and refugees from ethnic minority communities, submitted reports from consultations with families based on the same questions as the survey (3 and 18 responses represented respectively). Many of the responses were open-ended in nature. Quotes from children and young people's responses are used to exemplify the general themes of their responses. The full report by Dr Susan Elsley is available [here](#).

2022 Play Sufficiency Assessment, NPF4, Open Space Strategy Consultation and Survey

In 2022, a consultation on play was conducted by Play Scotland to support three upcoming policy developments in Scotland: Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA); the National Play Framework (NPF4), and the Open Space Strategy (OSS). Individuals and groups (schools and organisations) were invited to complete a survey and to submit supporting materials such as drawings, maps, and collages relating to play in their local area.

Individual survey responses were received from 140 children and young people, of whom 128 reported to be attending primary school and 9 reported to be attending secondary school. A further three respondents did not report whether they attend primary or secondary school, one of whom wrote that they were responding on behalf of their disabled grandchild. The wording of the survey questions differed for primary and secondary school children, respondents who did not answer this question were directed to the primary school questions. The responses from the two wordings have been pooled in this report. 46% of respondents described their gender as female, 53% as male, 1% as genderfluid, and 1% did not respond to the question about gender. Where available (92%), postcodes were used to estimate the socio-demographic background, but determining the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) for each postal area using the SIMD 2020v2 dataset. The sample included a fairly even spread across the five SIMD quintiles (from lowest to highest: 24%; 14%; 15%; 22%; 16%). Postcode data also indicated that there was no representation from Island communities in the dataset. The sample included responses from 19 disabled children.

Group survey responses were received from 36 groups representing 926 children and young people in total. 33 groups completed the primary school questions, 3 groups completed the secondary school questions. Most groups represented a mix of girls and boys, although some groups represented mostly or all children of one gender. Some groups reported their specific demographics. This indicated that group responses came from primary schools, both rural and urban, out-of-school play and childcare provisions, a youth council, and groups of children with disabilities and/or additional support needs including Downs syndrome and autism.



Scotland's
Play Strategy
Valuing play, every day



www.playscotland.org
info@playscotland.org



Company Number: SC197785, Scottish Charity Number: SC029167.

Play Scotland is the national expert in play for parents, providers, the play workforce and policy makers.

Published in 2023
ISBN: 978-1-7398594-7-3